

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

May 7, 2019

COMMITTEES  
APPROPRIATIONS  
ARMED SERVICES  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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The Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, D.C 20554

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Chairman Pai and Secretary Wilkie,

On average, one West Virginian dies by suicide every 24 hours. In a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Mountain State has experienced a 37% increase in suicide deaths since 1999, and there is no group more impacted than military Veterans. It is our duty to honor their sacrifice by helping them in their time of need, and the implementation of a three-digit suicide hotline for Veterans is an important lifeline for many of those most at risk.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that more than 20 Veterans and military members die by suicide every single day across the United States. That means that the suicide rate among Veterans is nearly twice that of the general population. Just last week, three Veterans took their lives at VA facilities across the country in the span of five days. This is a national tragedy. These brave men and women who have fought for our country and risk their lives for our nation deserve nothing less than the very best we can offer.

The National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-233), which was signed into law on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018, requires the Federal Communications Commission, in consultation with the Secretary of the Veterans Affairs, to complete a study on the effectiveness of an N11 dialing code for Veterans in crisis no later than August 2019. While this is an important step forward, I remain concerned about the lack of urgency around this issue. Getting our Veterans help in their time of need is literally a life and death issue.

On behalf of the Veterans and families across my great State of West Virginia who have lost friends and loved-ones to suicide, I strongly support the implementation of a three-digit suicide hotline for Veterans. As a member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, I want to ensure that your agencies have the resources and authority they need now and through the upcoming fiscal year to make this a reality. I respectfully request an update on the progress of the aforementioned feasibility study for establishing an N11 dialing code for Veterans in crisis, including a timeline for completion, and an overview of the outreach efforts conducted to date and planned in the future to ensure that a representative sample of Veterans, providers, and other relevant stakeholders have a voice in this process.

Since the launch of the VA Crisis Line for suicide prevention, crisis centers have received millions of calls from Veterans and many lives have been saved because of this critical service. However, countless Veterans remain unserved because they do not know who to call in their time of need. What are your agencies doing now to increase public awareness of the VA Crisis

Line and quantify the penetration rate among at-risk Veterans? What additional resources do you need in Fiscal year 2020 to maintain and augment those initiatives?

I look forward to your response to these critical questions and your ongoing help in making more resources available to the Veteran community. Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your continued service to our nation's Veterans.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III



OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

July 19, 2019

The Honorable Joe Manchin  
United States Senate  
306 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Manchin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018, particularly as it relates to the needs of military veterans. I wholeheartedly agree that the brave men and women who have fought for our country and risked their lives to protect our freedom deserve the very best we can offer.

The Act requires the Federal Communications Commission to produce a report by August 14, 2019, recommending whether a particular N11 dialing code or simple, easy-to-remember, three-digit dialing code should be used for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system and, if so, the logistics and costs associated with designating such a dialing code (among other issues). In accordance with the statute, the Commission is working closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as well as the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and the North American Numbering Council (NANC) as we carefully examine this important issue. The VA and SAMHSA provided reports to the Commission in early February 2019, and the NANC submitted its report in May. In turn, the Commission's Wireline Competition Bureau sought input from interested stakeholders on these studies and is currently drafting the report.

Consistent with Congress' directive, the report will recommend whether a particular N11 dialing code or other covered dialing code should be used for a nationwide suicide prevention and mental health crisis system. Before implementing any such recommendation, we would seek public input through a notice and comment proceeding. Interested parties, including veterans and veterans' organizations, would be invited to fully participate in that proceeding.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ajit V. Pai", is positioned above the printed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Ajit V. Pai